RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

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Overview of the Current State of Knowledge on Societal Outcomes of Housing

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this research project was to assess the current state of knowledge regarding linkages between housing and broader societal outcomes, specifically non-housing outcomes related to education, skills development and employment.

METHODOLOGY

A literature review was conducted to assess the current state of knowledge, identify data gaps, examine related methodological challenges and identify future research challenges. The research aimed to address the following questions:

- What is the current conceptual thinking on how housing affects societal outcomes related to education, skills development and employment? How can these be measured and what challenges exist?
- What perspectives exist regarding vulnerable groups with distinct housing needs?[1]
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the various methodological approaches used to identify, quantify and attribute societal outcomes?

Current Conceptual Thinking

The literature review included published research and evaluations of programs that examined any combination of education, skills development and employment-related outcomes of housing. Many authors stressed that economic and social development are driven by housing. Social inclusion or exclusion, economic growth and job creation are all linked to it—housing shapes individual well-being and a broad range of social outcomes because it is closely tied to the qualities of community and social space. Figure 1 illustrates the central role that housing plays in many aspects of a person's life.[2]

One of the key impacts of housing is on health outcomes and well-being, a linkage that has received more attention than perhaps any other. It has been a sub-category of the growing body of work on social inequalities and health. The work done in this area has shown evidence that highlights the positive outcomes that stable housing helps to achieve on the health of individuals.[3] Other linkages have also been explored, more specifically the impact that the quality of neighbourhoods can have on non-housing outcomes such as education and employment. Authors have identified geographies of opportunity that can impact the possibilities for residents living in different neighbourhoods.

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[1] Aboriginal people, seniors, persons with disabilities, youth and children, homeless populations, single-parent households, and recent immigrants and refugees.

[2] Carter, Tom and Chesya Polevychok (2004). *Housing is Good Social Policy.* Canadian Policy Research Networks.

[3] Examples of such research include: J.R. Dunn, 2000, *Housing and Health Inequalities: Review and Prospects for Research;* Dunn, 2002, *Housing and Inequalities in Health: A Study of Socioeconomic Dimensions of Housing and Self Reported Health from a Survey of Vancouver Residents;* Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003, *Social Determinants of Health Second Edition: The Solid Facts;* Health Canada, 2007, *People, Place and Health;* CMHC, 2003, *Housing Quality and Children's Socio-emotional Health.*

Canada

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HOME TO CANADIANS

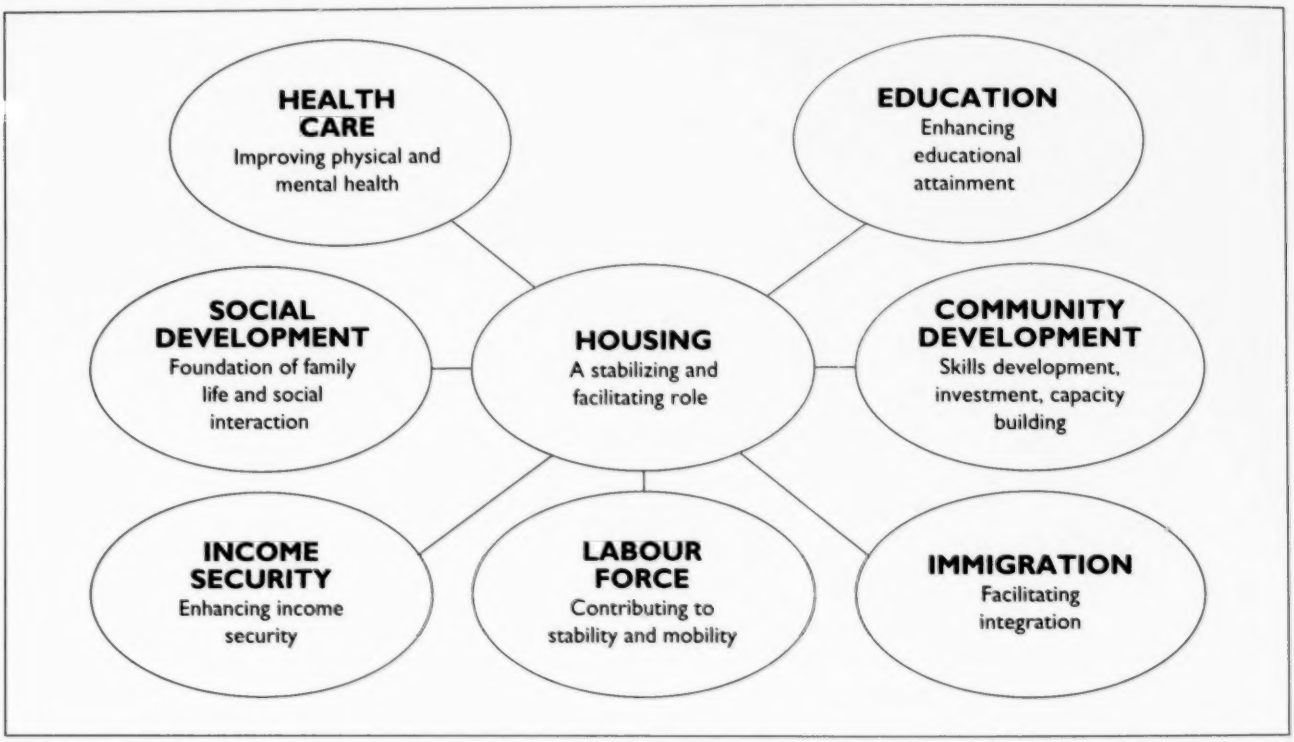

Figure 1

Across a metropolitan region, residents will not have equal opportunities, since employment markets and institutions are not distributed equally across the region. Households often locate in certain areas because of their socio-economic status and are thereby limited to particular employment markets and institutions. Such gaps in socio-economic opportunities between and among neighbourhoods can affect the possible opportunities for those living in a neighbourhood to access both public and private resources.

Limitations of Existing Research

While many of the reviewed studies did find linkages between housing and education, skills development and employment, the review highlighted the fact that there was often difficulty proving causality. This was partly due to the difficulty of separating family characteristics from location. Another issue that was often stressed, including by the authors of the reviewed studies themselves, was the lack of complete and current data, which can affect the validity of the research.

Although much has been written on housing and the links it has, and can have, to other societal and environmental elements, it is often difficult to determine the strengths and weaknesses of these findings and arguments. One of the goals of the literature review and the report was to evaluate these strengths and weaknesses in order to guide further research into the societal links of housing.

FINDINGS

Over 100 relevant research studies were examined in conducting this review. Despite a general lack of rigour, there is evidence that housing does have impacts on education, skills development and employment. These findings are not without their caveats, as various studies often found that, for some factors, there was contradictory evidence or simply not enough data or research to conclusively assert a particular outcome. As part of the review, gaps and related methodological challenges were identified, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the various studies. A summary table of the identified linkages from these studies can be found below.

Factors Related to Educational Outcomes

The stability of housing has been shown to give rise to improvements in educational performance. Some studies also found positive associations with tenure, with more positive educational outcomes for homeowners, although this is not conclusive in all cases, especially for lower-income owner households. Most positive outcomes seem to stem from the stability that housing offers, with positive outcomes shown in this respect for both owner and renter households. In Canada, a study by Curtis and Phipps (2000) found better educational outcomes for children living in owner-occupied housing; however, a key predictor was found to be the hours of parental time available each week for the children. This time spent with the children significantly improved their successes in school.

Housing conditions, such as overcrowding and the quality of the housing, are also associated with education outcomes. Factors like noise, overcrowding and poor housing conditions have been linked to poor educational achievement in children. At the same time, while housing conditions do appear to impact educational performance, much of the current research seems to point to socio-economic status as the predictive factor most related to educational outcomes.

Neighbourhood effects are perhaps the most intriguing, as their boundaries are often subjective and can give rise to complex social, economic, political and cultural environments in which housing exists. Nevertheless, a relationship has been documented in the literature between children's educational attainment and affluence, both at the neighbourhood level and at the individual family level. A Canadian study[4] that examined neighbourhood effects on children found that family differences seemed to play a greater role than the quality of the environment. Many authors, however, have cautioned about drawing conclusions between *neighbourhood* characteristics and *family* and *individual* characteristics. While these relationships clearly exist, current findings cannot be considered conclusive until further study is conducted on these linkages.

Factors Relating to Skills Development and Employment

Some literature found that disincentives to improving employment earnings were inherent in housing programs that require higher rents to be paid as earnings increase. Positive outcomes, however, were highlighted in the Jobs-Plus program[5] from the United States, which provided job placement and training assistance and enabled residents to keep more of their earnings. Women in particular gained from being involved in such combinations of housing and employment/skills development programs.

Research also showed that social security recipients were more likely to work if located closer to job opportunities. However, socio-economic factors were also shown to mitigate these findings, such as the ability to afford to move to a "better" area with more jobs or the availability and accessibility of means of transportation.

The literature review also identified a relationship between housing stability and employment/skills development outcomes, through the increased sense of security of the household.

Tenure was not found to have a significant effect on employment and skills development.

Vulnerable Groups

Although many of these findings concerned a range of different people and groups, the study found a lack of information regarding education, skills development and employment outcomes for those groups deemed most vulnerable (such as single-parent households, Aboriginal people and homeless populations). Some research findings did point to certain outcomes; for example, if women are able to find secure, affordable housing, their capacity to pursue educational and professional goals and their ability to form supportive networks are enhanced. Generally, however, the effects of housing on vulnerable groups are not well documented.

[4] Oreopoulos, Phillip (2003). *The Long-Run Consequences of Living in a Poor Neighborhood*, Quarterly Journal of Economics.

[5] Bloom, H.S., Riccio, J.A., Verma, N. (2005). *Promoting Work in Public Housing: The Effectiveness of Jobs-Plus.*

Issues of Methodology

Regarding the impact of housing on education, skills development and employment, the biggest issue that affected the quality and strength of the findings in many cases was that few of the studies used statistical or analytical techniques. In some cases, where empirical methods were used, the age of the data proved problematic. This lack of reliable, accurate and timely data represents a challenge.

The most striking knowledge gaps that currently exist are those in the data and information regarding the housing and education, skills development and employment outcomes for vulnerable groups. This represents a large gap in Canadian housing research. In most cases, information exists regarding the needs and the important role of housing for these groups, but very little is available in terms of data and analysis of the linkages themselves. More complete and current knowledge documenting the impacts and outcomes of housing for these individual groups would help strengthen housing policies and programs in Canada for the future.

Some studies did use reliable techniques, most significantly the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) and HOPE VI research projects in the United States, which were based on randomized control studies. Many studies were based on other, non-experimental, empirical study methodologies, such as longitudinal and cross-sectional. Other studies involved a mixed-method type, blending literature reviews and empirical analysis.

Table 1 summarizes the linkages between housing and education, skills development and employment that were identified in the literature.

Table 1 Summary of Identified Linkages[6]

Education	Examples of Indicators Used	Conclusions and Strength of Linkage
Neighbourhood affluence / educational attainment	■ Neighbourhood affluence; home ownership rates; residential stability/ instability; achievement scores; literacy of parents; median family income; availability of books in household.	■ Some studies have found positive educational outcomes for students and children related to neighbourhood affluence and level of neighbourhood education. ■ Neighbourhood affluence was noted as having a significant positive effect on reducing dropout rates of female students. ■ Other studies point to little or no effect of neighbourhood affluence. ■ Overall, findings are inconclusive: many authors stress that individual and family characteristics cannot be completely discounted, while others highlight incomplete knowledge of these linkages.
Family income / educational attainment	■ Social development; neighbourhood affluence/poverty; family income; parental education level; neighbourhood family structure.	■ Some studies have pointed to higher family educational attainment and income as being associated with educational outcomes.
Stability and transience	■ Family income; number of family moves; number of times children changed schools; tenure type; condition of housing.	■ It was noted that improved educational outcomes arise from housing stability. ■ Number of moves can also affect likelihood of graduation and educational performance.
Tenure (owning versus renting)	■ Success at school; family income; labour force participation; tenure; condition of home; civic engagement.	■ Positive association with children's educational attainment and homeownership was indicated in several studies. ■ Some studies point to negative aspects, or lack of understanding, of homeownership responsibilities and impacts for low-income households.
Housing conditions (physical characteristics: overcrowding, density, physical condition of dwelling, noise levels, and so on).	■ Child education performance; condition of housing; tenure; family income; educational services.	■ Strong evidence showed negative educational impacts from aspects such as noisy homes, overcrowded dwellings, living in poor housing conditions and homelessness. ■ Studies suggested also that good housing conditions are important for children's educational outcomes and can have effects (positive or negative) in other areas such as health and employment.

[6] See the consultant's report for a full bibliography of the studies reviewed.

Employment and Skills Development	Examples of Indicators Used	Conclusions and Strength of Linkage
Tenure (owning versus renting)	■ Employment and education level.	■ There was a lack of evidence and research showing a clear relationship between employment/skills development and tenure. ■ Tenure is more indicative of socio-economic status and employment status.
Income and rent	■ Education level; skills level; employment earnings.	■ Research has found a relationship between income-related rent structures and disincentives to work. Referred to as a "poverty trap" by some, the income-related rent structures penalize tenants for working, especially in lower-paying jobs. ■ Review of the Jobs-Plus program in the United States highlighted positive outcomes for participants, especially strong outcomes for women who participated in such endeavours.
Spatial inequalities	■ Welfare receipt; neighbourhood poverty rates; job accessibility as jobs per job seeker.	■ Housing location can have exclusionary effects on employment: regions where jobs are available can often be accompanied by high house prices, and housing (notably public housing) located in areas of high unemployment can make it more difficult for a person to access work. ■ Studies have highlighted that people are more apt to work if situated closer to work opportunities. ■ A locational factor exists between housing and employment, but authors stress that other factors should also be studied in future work, such as transportation accessibility and concentration of poverty.
Neighbourhood affluence / level of education	■ Gender of household head; level of education; parental earnings; sibling income comparisons over time; labour market engagement.	■ Studies have found few effects, either positive or negative, of high-poverty or low-poverty neighbourhoods on labour or employment. ■ Research also points to outcomes being attributable to socio-economic status, and not just moving to "better areas." ■ Other factors were noted, such as mass transit accessibility and concentration of poverty in a neighbourhood.
Stability	■ Rental type (private or public); current employment status; living arrangement; education level; difficulty in paying rent; factors affecting decisions about employment; difficulties in finding employment.	■ Studies have found positive effects (such as a better sense of security) of stable housing for unemployed tenants, inferring better chances or outcomes in finding employment. ■ Stability was also noted as having positive effects for women, facilitating support networks and aiding in accessing the workforce. ■ Research notes that this sense of security is likely an important factor for employment and skills development, through increased self-esteem and economic stability. ■ More research on this issue would help validate findings in this regard.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the literature is fairly consistent in finding that housing in itself is not the root cause of advantage and disadvantage; rather, it is only one element in a set of interrelated factors that determine the outcome. Some authors contend that improvements in housing are not enough to result in significant improvements in non-housing outcomes. Others point out that, because housing is so connected to the neighbourhood it is situated in, it has a major impact on individual well-being on a broad range of social outcomes.

For the individual or household, the evidence points to the observation that, the greater the degree of affordability, security of tenure, choice and quality of accommodation,[7] the more positive the impact, that is, the more positive the housing status, the greater the likelihood of positive educational performance, skills development and employment success.

[7] Measured in terms of housing characteristics, such as overcrowding, age and state of repair.

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Housing Research at CMHC

Under Part IX of the ***National Housing Act***, the Government of Canada provides funds to CMHC to conduct research into the social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields, and to undertake the publishing and distribution of the results of this research.

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